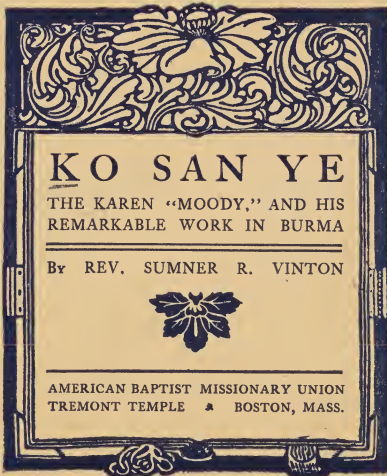


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CONTINUATION COMMITTEE

North American Section



KO SAN YE

THE KAREN "MOODY," AND HIS
REMARKABLE WORK IN BURMA

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INTRODUCTORY



KO SAN YE, the leader of the movement outlined in this brief sketch, is a remarkable illustration of the power of the gospel not only to save a proud Buddhist, but also to produce a type of Christian manhood which can impress and influence hundreds of others, and so gradually open the way for their acceptance of the truth itself. This movement, which is only the natural development of missionary effort, is full of promise, and affords occasion for gratitude to God that he is developing out of an ignorant and superstitious people those who are destined to have a large share in the evangelization of their countrymen. That other apostles like Ko San Ye may be raised up in all our mission fields is not too much to pray for nor to expect.

K O S A N Y E



THE most interesting feature of mission work in Burma in these later days is the Ko San Ye movement. Ko San Ye is a Karen, belonging to the Sgaw branch of his race. He was born and grew up among the hills of the Toungoo District. His age is not exactly known, but it is probably above forty years. His photograph is likely to be disappointing to those who have heard of him, as it cannot show clearly his eyes, which alone reveal to a stranger his real power. He has feared that his picture would be worshiped if it got among the people, but he finally consented to let me take it when I explained that I wanted to send it to America with a special request for prayer for him. But he refused to be photographed alone; so My Zan, a Karen who happened to be with him, and I, had to take our position on either side, and Mrs. Vinton took the picture.

Ko San Ye was, and still is, illiterate. He made an attempt to learn to read after his conversion, but he gave it up; his temperament is too nervous. But he has a remarkable memory for facts and

faces, and, considering the circumstances, knows the Bible well.



REV. S. R. VINTON, KO SAN YE AND MY ZAN

THROUGH THE GATE OF SORROW

When Ko San Ye was about thirty years old the death of his wife and only child first turned his heart seriously toward religion. Before that time, like all Karens, he had worshiped nature-spirits and demons as a matter of habit and training. But under the stress of a great grief, when almost crazed by sorrow, he turned to religion for comfort. Finding none in the faith of his own people, he embraced Buddhism. He lived in a mountain retreat,

where he had built a house in a tall tree. He was as good a Buddhist as he knew how to be, and he became known and sought out as a holy man. He built two small pagodas, and a kyaung, or priests' school.

He found no comfort in Buddhism, however, and later he adopted a philosophy known among the Karens as *Mawlay*. This takes from the Karen traditions of the purer sort a spiritual conception of God, and from Buddhism its moral code and the doctrine of salvation by works.

Then he heard of Christianity through several missionaries. He sought to know more of its truths, and at length he adopted it as the real truth for which he had so long been seeking. There was some doubt about his sincerity, but after a careful examination he was baptized in 1890 with about 140 of his followers. Up to that time he had been known as Ko Paiksan, which means, "Mr. Money."

At his baptism he said, "Ko Paiksan is dead. There is a new man in Christ, Ko San Ye (Mr. Food and Water). Ko Paiksan was the devil's servant, and Ko San Ye must serve God equally well."

THE CHAPEL BUILDER

Accordingly Ko San Ye obtained from government a grant of 20,000 acres of waste land in the Pegu District. There he established a village

which he called Padoplaw, and today it numbers several hundred houses. For this new village he wanted a chapel. He had seen the Ko Tha Byu Memorial Hall, which was built by the Karens of Bassein, and he decided to build one after the same specifications. He was then penniless, and without any regular following. His project involved the expenditure of over 70,000 rupees (more than \$23,000), for the new village was fifteen miles from the railroad and there were no good roads. Only the roughest timber, sawed by hand, could be had on the spot; shingles and matched boards had to be carted to the village under the worst possible conditions. But Ko San Ye was undaunted. He said that the money was all the Lord's, and that if the Lord would open the hearts of the people the chapel could be built. Then he started to go around among the people, preaching the gospel and asking for funds for the big chapel. As fast as the money came in it was used at once. He was asked,

"Why don't you wait till all the funds are in hand?"

"If the people do not see work start as soon as they commence to give," he replied, "they will fear that I am 'eating' the money." The building is in use today.

PILGRIM REST HOUSES

For some time after building his big chapel he remained at Padoplaw, and there large numbers of

people made pilgrimages to the village to see and hear him; and the remarkable fact is that most of these people were heathen. To accommodate these pilgrims a long, shed-like building was put up next to the chapel, where they could be fed and sheltered. At Nyaunglebin, the railroad station most convenient to Padoplaw, a similar rest house was put up.

About five years ago Ko San Ye began to go about the country, following the line of the railroad and some of the chief water-ways. Certain places were fixed upon as centers where he would stop and meet the people. In these centers temporary rest houses of bamboo were put up, and as the money came in more rapidly, these gave place to permanent buildings. This has gone on with surprising rapidity, until there are now completed or nearly so, five permanent buildings, at an expense of 250,000 rupees (more than \$83,333). Two of these buildings are at Ye Le and Museko in the Shwegyin Hills, and the others at Tongyi, Okkan, and Letpadan, along the railway. At Nyaunglebin and Hmaubi, also on the railway, buildings are in progress, and temporary buildings are in constant use at Ganyaung, Danubyu and Henzada.

Ko San Ye visits all these places, where large numbers of people are present to meet him, to listen to him, and to make contributions to the work of erecting these buildings. In October, 1902, over 6,000 people came to him at Okkan within three

days, and over 15,000 rupees were brought in. At the same place, without the special influence of his presence, 30,000 rupees were contributed for the Okkan building during two months at the close of 1903. At no time later, however, have such crowds



KO SAN YE'S TONGYI BUILDING
COMPLETED AND DEDICATED IN MAY, 1903

gathered as during 1902; but this must not be interpreted as indicating the waning of the movement. Those who were attracted by curiosity or wrong ideas have indeed fallen away, but the number of real seekers after truth has increased.

KO SAN YE AND OUR MISSION

While neither Ko San Ye nor his immediate helpers are directly connected with our Baptist mission except as members of Karen churches, he has thus

far used all his wonderful prestige and influence with the people to aid our missionaries. He is conscious that he himself is not fully qualified to give the gospel to the Karens, and he makes great efforts to bring them under the preaching of the missionaries and the Karen pastors, to whose work he gives complete endorsement. All his buildings are at our service for preaching, and his largest pavilions have been transferred to the charge of our Rangoon Sgaw Karen Home Mission Society. In his chapel at Padoplaw I have on four occasions preached to audiences of from 500 to 800 people. A large percentage of these had renounced heathen practices, but had not actually accepted Christianity; and at Padoplaw there is a school of from 80 to 125 pupils, teaching as high as the fifth grade.

In the towns where Ko San Ye has his buildings regular services are held, and schools are conducted. Fortunately we have at most of these centers well-trained, experienced native pastors in charge, and within a year there have been large ingatherings from among these people. In all, over 2,000 have confessed Christ, all of whom first heard of the Saviour through this movement. A very significant fact concerning these baptisms is that a great many of them are from the Pwo Karens, who are the most Burmanized of all the Karens, and therefore the most Buddhistic, and who have all along been most callously indifferent.

KO SAN YE'S HUMILITY

Ko San Ye's humility is remarkable. The adulation, amounting to worship on the part of the more ignorant, has not turned his head. The vast sums of money that have been poured unquestioningly



KO SAN YE'S STEAM LAUNCH

into his hands, and for which he has been asked to render no account, have not made him grasping. When he is asked for the use of his steam launch, he replies:

"I have none, it is the Lord's, and you are welcome to use it in his work."

When he is thanked for financial help he says: "I have done nothing, God alone can bring things to pass."

When I ask him to accompany me to some village, he will reply:

"I don't know; if the Lord so leads I will go."

Faith and prayer are most vitally real to him. God is ever present. He regularly has three seasons of prayer daily, but on every special occasion there is special prayer as well. Once, at his own village, he came to the chapel where I was stopping, at four in the morning, that we might have prayer. There was a special burden on his heart.

His patience is remarkable. In a period of three years, during which time I have seen him under all circumstances (and at the time of writing this he is actually living in my own house), I have never seen him either impatient or down-hearted. I have seen him when he evidently felt the burden of his work, but never discouraged. "God is able," is the most often repeated sentence on his lips, and is the best explanation of the man and his work that could be given.

PROBLEMS

Taw Mch Pa. It must not be thought that all this movement has been without its serious and difficult

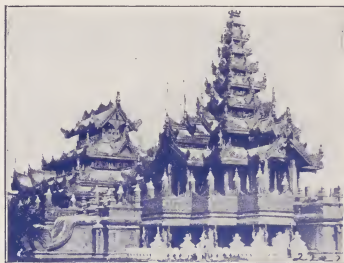
problems. Ko San Ye's own people have misunderstood his work. Large numbers of heathen Karens have flocked to him because they thought they saw in him Taw Meh Pa, the long-expected Karen Messiah, whom they have conceived of as a temporal king. Their interpretations of Ko San Ye's talks have led to absurd rumors, some of which have even received the attention of the government; but this is lessening. Ko San Ye has been made to see the necessity of being more plain in his statements, that his characteristic speaking in parable shall not be misunderstood. Government is now fully satisfied that his aim is purely religious.

The Magic Bag. Many foolish stories of Ko San Ye's supernatural power have gone the rounds of the heathen villages, losing nothing, but gaining as they passed along. For example, they say that he has a "magic bag" from which he draws at will any sum of money, be it an anna or a *lakh* of rupees. On one occasion, in front of a crowd of several hundred heathen, I asked Ko San Ye to show me this magic money bag. He had not expected any questions, but he smiled pleasantly, turned toward the people with his hands stretched out and said: "These are the only bag I know."

The people saw the point and were satisfied, but unfortunately all notions of his supernatural power are not so easily removed.

Christ or Ko San Ye? A more serious problem

shows itself in the question frequently asked: "Are these converts really baptized into Christ, or into Ko San Ye?" There is a danger that some may profess conversion and ask for baptism, from Ko San Ye's example, without intelligent faith in Christ. No doubt this has sometimes happened, but the danger has been understood from the first, and it has been guarded against in several ways. Converts are seldom baptized when Ko San Ye is present. None are baptized unless they have declared their intention to become Christians some months previously,



A BUDDHIST MONASTERY

often over a year, and have shown their seriousness of purpose in a complete abandonment of heathenish worship and practices. The examination of candidates on the essential points of sense of sin and faith in Christ has been conducted by our older and more experienced native pastors.

Training. The problem of training these converts is a growing one. Many are isolated, though fortunately this is not the rule. An encouraging feature that deserves mention is that a large percentage of the converts have been heads of families and groups of families. In some cases practically entire villages have become Christian.

Your Part. But with all the encouragement the problems of the movement are serious. It is a matter of constant prayer with us, and the chief object of this article is that all who read will be led to pray that the right sort of workers may be raised up to train the converts, and that Ko San Ye himself may continue to use his influence over the people in quiet dependence upon God for guidance and strength, and that we missionaries may have all needed wisdom and power to deal with these problems as they come before us.

